

Customizing and Implementing the Decision Helper

Decision Helper—A Guide to Health Plan Quality from the Consumer's Point of View is a computer-based decision support tool designed to help consumers make an informed choice of health plan. Please refer to the document *Reporting Results of the CAHPS® Health Plan Survey* for a discussion of CAHPS reporting concepts and issues and how this guide fits in with the other CAHPS reporting products.

The CAHPS team has developed a template of the electronic guide that you can adapt for your project. To view the template on the Internet, please go to <http://www.rand.org/health/cahps/dh/index.html>. You can also download the complete files set of the template (see instructions below). You will need to consult Web site administrators—whether they are vendors or staff with computer skills—to help set up and customize the *Decision Helper* to meet your project's needs. The *Decision Helper* has been designed so that someone with basic Web programming skills can easily customize the system.

The template contains names of a generic sponsor and health plans as well as sample ratings data. Your Web programmer can help you to replace these names and data with your project's information; you should also replace the sample sponsor logo with your own logo. If you wish to perform additional customization of the *Decision Helper*, please refer to the end of this section for further instructions.

The following text contains instructions for downloading and customizing the Decision Helper. The information is divided into the following three sub-sections:

- **Downloading and Customizing the *Decision Helper***
- **Optional Customization of the *Decision Helper***
- **Final Notes Before Implementing the *Decision Helper***

Downloading and Customizing the *Decision Helper*

The following instructions explain how to download the complete files set from an FTP server and how to decompress and install the files. The instructions also tell you how to customize your newly installed files to reflect your organization's name, the health plan names, and the results of your CAHPS survey.

Instructions for Downloading the Complete Decision Helper Template

1. Connect to the **FTP** host at:

- Host: [ftp.rand.org](ftp://ftp.rand.org)
- Directory: [/pub/cahps/](ftp://ftp.rand.org/pub/cahps/)

If you are using an **FTP** client, you will need to use binary mode for the **FTP** transfer. You may also use your web browser to download the files with the **URL**:

- <ftp://ftp.rand.org/pub/cahps>
2. Download the zipped file, [cahpsv2.zip](#).

The zipped file, [cahpsv2.zip](#), contains the front-end directories and files of the *Decision Helper*.
 3. Unzip the file with **WinZip** (or a version of **PKzip** that does not automatically convert lower case letters to capital letters when the files are extracted).
 4. Unpack [cahpsv2.zip](#) in your system's top-level **htdocs** or **HTML** directory (the name will depend on your Web server's configuration). A subdirectory named [cahpsv2](#) will be created containing the **HTML**, **JavaScript**, and **graphics** files for the *Decision Helper*.

Instructions for Customizing the Decision Helper to Your Site

For the most part, the screens for the *Decision Helper* can be used as they are designed. However, there are two types of changes you will need to make in order to adapt the template to meet your organization's needs. Specifically, you will need to:

1. **Make changes to three specific screens**
2. **Enter your plan information into the *Decision Helper*:**
 - Names of health plans
 - Types of health plans
 - Results of your CAHPS survey

1. Making Changes to Three Specific Screens

There are three screens in the *Decision Helper* that currently have placeholders that you will need to replace with specific information:

- **Home Page** (index.htm and index.html) - Change the sponsor logo

- **About the Survey** (ratin1.htm) – Change the sponsor name, number surveyed, number surveyed in each type of plan, number of HMOs and number of PPOs represented in survey, sponsor area
- **Contact Information** (worksht2.htm) - Add plan names and plan contact information

Although most of these changes are easy to make, they are best made by someone familiar with Web graphics and **HTML** coding. If implemented improperly, the changes may affect the appearance of the page or the links to other screens.

2. Enter Your Plan Information into the *Decision Helper*

Throughout the *Decision Helper*, various screens display specific health plan names, survey questions, and plan ratings in the form of star charts and bar graphs. You may enter the names and types of the health plans, as well as your CAHPS survey results, by editing the two **JavaScript** files provided. These **JavaScript** files are named **plandefs.js** and **ratings.js**. They both reside in the **/cahpsv2/scripts/** subdirectory.

The following text explains how to install your CAHPS survey results into the *Decision Helper* by editing the two files.

File 1: plandefs.js

The file named **plandef.js** contains identifying information about the plans: number of plans available, plan name, and plan type. You can enter the number of plans, plan names, and plan types into this file with a text editor or word processor which allows files to be saved in **Text Only** or **ASCII** formats.

Figure 1 shows a sample of **plandefs.js**, in a case where there are five plans and two plan types (HMOs and PPOs).

Here are line-by-line instructions for making changes to the file:

- `var NumPlans = 5`
 - Replace **5** with the number of plans.
- `var NumQues = 7`
 - Do not make any changes to this number. It represents the number of survey items in the questionnaire.
- `var PlanNames = new Array (NumPlans+1)`
 - Do not make any changes to this line.

Figure 1. Sample text file (plandefs.js)

```
// Install this file as "plandefs.js" in the scripts/ directory

var NumPlans = 5; // The number of plans
var NumQues = 7; // DO NOT CHANGE THIS NUMBER
var PlanNames = new Array(NumPlans+1);

// Plan Names: best to use abbreviated names for display purposes
PlanNames[1] = "Name of Plan 1";
PlanNames[2] = "Name of Plan 2";
PlanNames[3] = "Name of Plan 3";
PlanNames[4] = "Name of Plan 4";
PlanNames[5] = "Name of Plan 5";

Var PlanType = new Array(NumPlans+1);
PlanType[1] = "HMO";
PlanType[2] = "HMO";
PlanType[3] = "HMO";
PlanType[4] = "PPO";
PlanType[5] = "PPO";

Var NumPlanTypes = 2;
Var PlanTypes = new Array(2);
PlanTypes["HMO"] = "1,2,3"; // Plans 1,2,3 are type HMO
PlanTypes["PPO"] = "4,5"; // Plans 4,5 are type PPO
```

- PlanNames[1] = "Name of Plan 1"
- Replace **Name of Plan 1** with the name of your first plan. Be sure to insert the name of the plan within the quotation marks, so that the quotation marks remain in the code.
- **NOTE:** You may wish to consider abbreviating those plan names that are unusually long. Very long plan names may look awkward on certain screens, particularly on screens that display tables containing data for each plan. Another issue to consider is that unusually long plan names may appear dominant on screens, and thus may draw attention to that particular plan. This makes it more difficult for users to compare all plans equally.
- PlanNames[2] = "Name of Plan 2"

- Replace **Name of Plan 2** with the name of your second plan. Repeat for your third, fourth, and fifth plans. If you have fewer than five plans, delete the excess lines. If you have more than five plans, create as many lines as are necessary to incorporate all of your plan names. PlanType[1] = "HMO"
- Replace **HMO** with the type of plan that corresponds to your first plan. Remember to use short abbreviations, such as PPO or FFS, for display purposes.
- PlanType[2] = "HMO"
- Replace **HMO** with the type of plan that corresponds to your second plan. Repeat for your third, fourth, and fifth plans. If you have fewer than five plans, delete the excess lines. If you have more than five plans, create as many lines as are necessary to incorporate all of your plans.
- var NumPlanTypes = 2
- Replace **2** with the total number of plan types available. For example, if your plans include three plan types -- HMO, PPO, and FFS -- then replace the number **2** with a **3**. If you only offer HMOs and PPOs, then leave the number 2 as is.
- var PlanTypes = new Array(2)
- Replace the number **2** with the same number inserted in the previous step.
- PlanTypes["HMO"] = "1,2,3"; // Plans 1,2,3 are type HMO
PlanTypes["PPO"] = "4,5"; // Plans 4,5 are type PPO
- This example shows two lines of data for an example with two types of plans (HMOs and PPOs) and five plans. These two lines describe the first three plans as HMOs and the last two plans as PPOs.
- First, create as many lines as are necessary to incorporate all of your plan types (for example, if you have three types of plans, copy and paste one of the example lines so that it creates a third line). Next, replace the HMO and PPO with the appropriate plan type (for example, if you have HMOs, PPOs, and FFS plans, then you may leave the first two lines as they are and simply replace the third line's plan type with FFS). Last,

replace the numbers "1,2,3" and "4,5" with the appropriate plan numbers that correspond to those types of plans (be sure to leave the quotation marks in the code).

- For example, if you assigned the plan named GreatHealthPlan, an HMO, as your first plan; FriendlyHealthPlan, a PPO, as your second health plan; AffordableHealthPlan, an HMO, as your third plan; and ConvenientHealthPlan, a FFS plan, as your fourth health plan, then you should have three lines of code that appear as follows:
 - PlanTypes["HMO"] = "1,3"; // Plans 1 and 3 are types HMO
 - PlanTypes["PPO"] = "2"; // Plan 2 is type PPO
 - PlanTypes["FFS"] = "4"; // Plan 4 is type FFS

File 2: ratings.js

This file contains the CAHPS survey results for each plan. The information you enter will be used to generate summary star charts and detailed bar graphs.

Figure 2 shows a sample of **ratings.js**, in a case where there is one plan and seven topics. The template file **ratings.js**, provided with the *Decision Helper* file set, contains sample code for 5 plans and seven topics.

Here are instructions for making changes to the **ratings.js** file:

- AdultStars[1] = new Array(3,3,2,2,3,3,3); //adult stars for plan 1, topics 1-7
- Throughout the **ratings.js** code, there are lines like these that begin small sections of code. Each of these beginning lines contains a number within brackets [] -- this number corresponds to the plan number. For example, if the number is [1], that is the data for your first plan. If the number is [2], then the data that follows is for your second plan.
- First, make sure that the number of sections in the code is the same as the number of your plans. The example code provided in the **ratings.js** file has code for five plans (only one plan is shown below because of limited space). If you have more plans, then simply copy and paste this code as many times as you need it, and change the numbers in the square brackets [] accordingly. If you have fewer than five plans, then simply delete the excess chunks of code.
- The first line of code is used to generate a row of stars for the Survey Results summary table that looks something like this (the example shows stars for only four topics and one plan):

	Getting care that is needed	Getting care without long waits	How well doctors communicate	How people rated their health care
Plan 1	H	HH	HHH	HHH

- Each sequence of numbers, such as (3,3,2,2,3,3,3), corresponds to the star ratings for the seven topics, in order. Change each sequence of numbers by inserting the data that you collected with your CAHPS survey. Repeat this process for each of your plans and for each data set.

Figure 2. Sample text file for bar charts section (ratings.js)

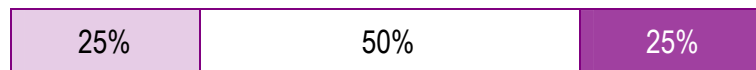
```
// Install this file as "ratings.js" in the scripts/ directory

// STAR AND BAR CHART RATINGS
//
var AdultRatings = new Array(NumPlans+1);
var ChildRatings = new Array(NumPlans+1);
var ExpRatings = new Array(NumPlans+1);

var AdultStars = new Array(NumPlans+1);
var ChildStars = new Array(NumPlans+1);
var ExpStars = new Array(NumPlans+1);

// Order of values in quotes: "worse, in-between, better"
AdultStars[1] = new Array(3,3,2,2,3,3,3); //adult stars for plan 1, topics 1-7
AdultRatings[1] = new Array(
  "50,30,20", // Topic 1 adult ratings for plan 1, "worse, in-between, better"
  "30,50,20", // Topic 2 adult ratings for plan 1, etc.
  "45,45,10", // Topic 3 adult ratings for plan 1
  "15,15,70", // Topic 4 adult ratings for plan 1
  "33,47,20", // Topic 5 adult ratings for plan 1
  "46,44,10", // Topic 6 adult ratings for plan 1
  "49,31,20" // Topic 7 adult ratings for plan 1
);
```

- Be sure to leave the parentheses () around the numbers in the code, and to separate numbers with a comma, as indicated in the above example.
- Repeat the above steps for the sections of code that begin with **ChildStars[1] = new Array** and **ExpStars[1] = new Array**. These chunks of code represent the data for **Children's Care** and for **People Who've Used a Lot of Care**. Leave both sets of code in the file if you are reporting data for both groups in addition to the regular **Survey Ratings** by adults. If you are reporting neither or only one, then delete the additional set(s).
- **AdultRatings[1] = new Array(**
 - "50,30,20", // Topic 1 adult ratings for plan 1, "worse, in-between, better"
 - "30,50,20", // Topic 2 adult ratings for plan 1, etc.
 - "45,45,10", // Topic 3 adult ratings for plan 1
- The code that appears after the first line of code in each section is used to generate the bar graphs. Each three-number sequence corresponds to a percentage of people who responded "worse survey results," "in-between answers," and "better survey results" on a response scale. There are seven lines in each chunk of code after the beginning line. These seven lines represent the seven topics that people were asked about. Change each three-number sequence by inserting the data that you collected with your CAHPS survey. Repeat this process for each of your plans.
- The numbers you enter will be used to generate a display of the percentages and their corresponding bar proportions that looks something like this:



- **ChildRatings[1] = new Array(**
- **ExpRatings[1] = new Array(**
- The chunks of code that begin with **ChildRatings** or **ExpRatings** represent the data for **Children's Care** and for **People Who've Used a Lot of Care**. Leave both sets of code in the file if you are reporting data

for both groups in addition to the regular Survey Ratings by adults. If you are reporting neither or only one, then delete the additional set(s).

- For those data sets that remain, be sure that the number of chunks of code corresponds to the number of plans you have (remember, there are chunks of code for five plans, so add or delete chunks as necessary). Then change each of the three-number sequences by inserting the data you collected with your CAHPS survey.

You have completed editing the two JavaScript files. The Decision Helper should now be customized according to your specifications. See the next section to learn about optional customization.

Optional Customization of the *Decision Helper*

Reporting Supplemental Items

Your organization may want to report supplemental items in addition to the core items of the CAHPS survey; these should be reported in a separate table. This table should follow the table that shows ratings on specific topics. Use that table as a template so that the new table has the same layout, color, and fonts. Then customize the table heading, column headings, and star ratings. Assign someone skilled in Web development (e.g., **HTML** programming) to do the programming to add the table, but be sure to have someone familiar with the supplemental items responsible for choosing appropriate table and column headings and examining the SAS output to determine the right number of stars to insert in each cell.

Reporting Cost and Benefits Information

Your organization may want to report information on plan costs and benefits with the CAHPS survey results. RAND has developed a web-based decision tool called the ***Health Cost Calculator*** that helps consumers to estimate and compare their out-of-pocket costs across available plans. The tool is helpful for educating consumers about the costs of care, showing the value of health insurance, illustrating the cost implications of needing different amounts of care, and budgeting for health expenses. For employers who offer a healthcare flexible spending account, the tool also helps consumers to determine the optimal amount to contribute. The information in the ***Health Cost Calculator*** can be presented separately or integrated with other information, including CAHPS survey results.

Final Notes Before Implementing the *Decision Helper*

As noted, many of the changes you may want to make to the *Decision Helper* are best implemented by someone familiar with **HTML** codes and general computer skills. We realize that many organizations may also have specific needs that we have not anticipated. In such situations, any decision that significantly affects the layout and navigation of the *Decision Helper* must be made in consultation with technical experts, i.e., someone with Web design skills and/or computer programming expertise. For example, if your organization decides to incorporate plan-specific cost and benefits information or to link to other sites, you need to work closely with technical experts to plan and implement the desired changes.

If you have further questions about customizing the *Decision Helper*, please contact David Kanouse at RAND at 310-393-0411, ext. 6833. If you have any other questions, please contact the CAHPS User Network at CAHPS1@westat.com or call the *CAHPS Help Line* at (800) 492-9261.